

The Essence of Nature

By Christopher Hinkle

For as long as I can remember, I have always loved being in the forests here in the Pacific Northwest. The soft sound of trickling water, the sight of a chickaree nibbling on damp needles, the fresh smell of Sitka spruce trees, the touch of a spongy nurse log and the fresh-tasting air is always magical.

Recently I visited Ten Mile Creek Audubon preserve on the central Oregon coast. Fog hung in the crisp air as I walked down the hill and into the meadow. Light drizzle was afloat in the sky. A giant Bigleaf maple, with huge drooping branches draped in sheets of moss, stood in the middle of the clearing. Walking into the old-growth forest bordering the stream, the refreshing smell of spruce needles filled the air. I could hear the soothing gurgle of Ten Mile Creek, a rushing series of riffles and eddies. Monster-like cedars flanked the creek, and up the hill towered endless spruce and firs, shrouded in ghost-like fog. An outlying snag was scarred by lightning and riddled with woodpecker holes.

I sat on a log to simply watch, listen, and soak in my natural surroundings. The damp forest floor was carpeted in sword ferns and tangles of salmonberries decorated with vibrant orange berries. The shrubs obscured a decaying nurse log lined with baby hemlocks. Two deer sauntered past, sniffing at the dense clusters of mushrooms that poked out of the rich soil. A kinglet anxiously flitted from shrub to shrub. In the distance, a Wrentit called.

As I stood up to go, I reflected to myself about how the temperate rainforests and towering trees here in the Pacific Northwest will always be an important part of my life. Without

them, my life would be different. When I'm amongst giant trees in a healthy forest, my head always feels crystal clear like never before, and my tired body feels restored. The forest never fails to lull me into a trance and calm me down. There is some primitive, intangible connection I feel when I sit peacefully in wild untamed woods. And when I'm not in the forest, it is always reassuring just knowing that it exists, the plants and wildlife growing and living like they always have.

When the eerie whistle of a Varied Thrush drifts down from the top a distant tree and the beautiful song of a Hermit Warbler rings through the woods, everything seems to stand still, and my life is unimaginably perfect just for that brief moment in the forest when I truly understand the essence of nature.